

## Just A Shot Away by Deggie

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**Summary:**

Eddie likes to think he's one of the best PC's in The Met.

He also likes to think that he's merely distracted by his partner, Richie's, constant tomfoolery and incompetence. He convinces himself that this is the case, until the evidence concludes one devastatingly wonderful thing - Eddie is pathetically, and irreparably in love with Richie Tozier.

# Just A Shot Away

## Author's Note:

- For [idk-just-call-me-george](#).

This is a 'drabble' for idk-just-call-me-george!

Has a British IT AU happened yet? If not, here it is. Loosely inspired by Hot Fuzz. I had fun with this, and I hope you enjoy.

Artistic liberties are taken in that I have no idea how the police system works so this could be a literal fairytale in that respect. One thing I do know for sure is that they aren't allowed their phones while on duty so Richie having the AUX lead is totally fanciful. But that's the fun of it, right?

Here's his playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0quFcIdOcpIh2BiwcGKxeR?si=9xAlzN65RGqb0BT40GTjfg>

Everything Eddie Kaspbrak ever did started with a 'fuck you', and ended with a 'fuck it'. He thought it might have ended with his teenage years, that he could chalk his odium down to teen rebellion, but it never did leave him, and like a self fulfilling prophecy, that first 'fuck you' lay the foundations to a very inevitable 'fuck it' at a later date. Perhaps he should have seen the warning signs earlier in his life, when his actions weren't much different, the only substitute being the word 'fuck' for fear of getting a clip round the ear from his mum. It had been a continual dosage thrust down his throat (along with whatever else his overly neurotic mother would insist on medicating him with) that he wouldn't amount to much, that he wouldn't succeed, that he'd stay exactly where he was - tucked lovingly (stiflingly) beneath the bingo wing of Mrs Kaspbrak. She bread a miserable child from that suffocating love, one that feared the question 'why' until his ineludible snapping point. Eddie still remembers the conversation that sparked his lifelong vicious cycle into place. He was 10, it was 1999 - it went like this:

“Why can’t I have a Pogo Ball for Christmas, mummy?”

“Because I said so.”

“But why? I’ve been so good this year. Gooder than ever.”

“You’re a very good boy, such a good boy. My good boy.”

“So why can’t I have a Pogo Ball?”

“Because your friend Billy sprained his ankle on one just last week. A sprain for Billy is a break for you. You’re far too delicate for dangerous toys like that, Eddie-bear.”

It had the same tone as every single ‘no’ he had ever received, but this one was different, because he’d questioned it. He remembers how good it felt to have something to disprove, and how fired up he was to do something he never had before: rebel. So he went to Billy’s after school the very next day, and they played on Billy’s Pogo Ball in the back garden. Eddie loved that stupid toy, and watched as Billy cautiously balanced on it with a dodgy ankle, marvelled as he completed a timid hop. They took it in turns to play with it, and with each rotation, Eddie got more confident and more daring. His jumps got higher, his bounces more frequent, and it was the most fun he’d had in ages - the kind of fun that filled the lungs (that his mother called fragile) to bursting point. Even when the predestined tumble happened, and his ankle did indeed break, it was still so much fun that the shock of the gunshot loud snap caused him to laugh instead of cry.

6 weeks on crutches, grounded for a month, and definitely no Pogo Ball for Christmas.

It was this incident that triggered the ‘fuck you’ state of mind, for it made him realise that his mother didn’t fear his fragility, she feared his bravery.

Nothing changed, he still had to fight to prove himself, and as he grew he discovered that it wasn’t just his mother that strived to hold him back but his teachers and peers, too. Eddie was apparently destined for a life wrapped in cotton wool, and sent into the world with a sign around his neck that said ‘protect me, I’m helpless’.

So he did what every frustrated and desperate to prove themselves young person does, and at the age of 22, applied to the police.

"Fuck it," he told himself. "If I'm the one protecting them, that'll show them how brave I am and how wrong they were."

Throughout the application process, his mother would belittle his chances and doubt his succession, and he would intone perpetually: 'a sprain for Billy is a break for you', just to remind himself that he was far braver than she'd like to think. When he got past the first three stages (the application, the test, and the interview), and the physical was looming, his mother simply scoffed and said "with lungs like yours, you'll never pass."

That was the first time he said 'fuck you' to his mum. It might have been under his breath, but she heard it, alright, and when he passed the physical and proved her wrong, she didn't look him in the eye for days.

The next seminal 'fuck you' Eddie would utter would be upon his first meeting with his new partner, Richie Tozier. The two men looked each other up and down, Eddie squaring his shoulders and puffing out his chest (he was the shortest male constable in the Met, and subject to accusations of 'Scrappy Doo Syndrome'), and Richie lathering the goofiest smile Eddie had ever seen on his stupid, scruffy, and ruggedly handsome features. Eddie remembers thinking that, remembers the sensation of it distorting his vision as he tried his very best to assert some kind of dominance to the partnership, and still to this day, the fact that he'd thought it makes his cheeks turn beetroot red.

"So you're the scrawny fucker I've been hearing all about!" Richie had piped up to put an end to their squaring up. Their sergeant had slipped in a "play nice" just before Eddie had snapped back a characteristic "fuck you". By this point, Eddie had been doing his job for five years, and had stuck rigidly to the rules, having little to no fun at all. It had been knowledge of the entire team that he well and truly needed to lighten up, so partnering him up with the infamous 'laughing policeman' of Kentish Town was something of a well formed plan.

It was a plan that, much to Eddie's reluctance, would work. Only in

private, mind you.

Considering they spent almost every day for the next three years in each others pockets, and Richie isn't dead yet, and Eddie is even still tolerating Richie at all, makes the success of the plan much more public than Eddie would like to think. As irritating as he is, Eddie can't resist the silliness of his colleague, and in fact, though he would hate to admit it, finds his company intoxicating. As the years have progressed, the intoxication has become something of a comfort that Eddie would not be able to see the day through without. And how Richie makes Eddie laugh, oh, how he laughs. He hates to give it to him, and being the stubborn little toad he is, puts up a poked fight against giving into the laughter, but ends up corpsing anyway.

Sure, it started with a hostile 'fuck you', but from that point there have been many more 'fuck you's, and with every single one exclaimed, the syllables have triggered a different taste on Eddie's tongue. Until, the evidence concluded one devastatingly wonderful thing - Eddie is pathetically, and irreparably in love with Richie Tozier.

~

He remembers the day of the blessed revelation. It was December 12th, and despite what all those sappy Christmas films set in the city might like you to believe, it doesn't snow at Christmas time in England. The weather sets itself in a mould of tepid horizontal moisture that doesn't fall from the sky, but sits in the air and yet still manages to drench you through. It's grey and bleak, and the city is also grey and bleak. Eddie loathes it; it makes him a misery guts to a heightened extent. Richie, however, has always maintained a continuous joviality year round, come rain or shine. It's sickening, but it's glorious, too.

So on this day, they'd made a call to a gym in Peckham; two ridiculously stacked yuppies had got into a scuffle (the entire situation was as it sounds, utterly ludicrous). Richie and Eddie had been given the code to get into the gym - 6969, Richie loved that - they'd been in, sorted the situation, left and got back into the car, where Richie announced he'd left his notepad (important) inside the gym.

"You fucking moron, there's all sorts of sensitive information in that!"

Eddie had preached.

“I know, I know. I just got distracted by all those rippling muscles.”

“I can’t believe - Richie, go back-”

“One of the guys wanted to show me vids of his body building competition display. Like, Christ, it’s hard enough having to resist alcohol and all that other cool stuff on the job, but videos of that silver fox, oiled up and straining? I nearly caved, Eds. So close.”

Eddie remembers rubbing his forehead in severe frustration amongst other things at this point - was Richie hinting, or mocking him, or just absentmindedly joking about? Most likely, it was the latter, but Eddie to this day still doesn’t know.

“Go and get it, you fucking pillock.”

So Richie did, with instruction from Eddie of how to get into the building (type 6969 into the buzzer, press the tick once, wait for the door to click, enter), and Eddie hovered outside on double yellows, taking advantage of the police car excuse well and truly.

He watched Richie tap the number in, jog the door handle a couple times, type the number in again, jiggle with the door a bit more, and repeat himself a few times before Eddie, enraged and astounded, intervened.

Rolling down his window, he yelled “Rich, there are some people coming down the stairs, grab the door off of them.” to which Richie gave a thumbs up, signalling apparent understanding.

Eddie watched with disbelief, outrage, and somehow adoration, as Richie let the door close behind the gym-goers, and then proceed to ask them how to get in via the buzzer.

What an idiot, Eddie had thought, I love him so much.

Panicked by this revelation, Eddie sped around the block before Richie reappeared, to get it out of his system. It never did leave his system.

~

That was nearly a year ago now.

It's safe to say, that when it comes to acting upon his feelings for Richie, Eddie is yet to say 'fuck it'. He's been close so many times, unbearably so. Too many to list, but he recalls a few.

~

Richie was Eddie's secret Santa that same December. In the station, beneath a tacky tinsel draped plastic tree, Eddie prized a poorly wrapped box with the merry eyes of his colleagues upon him. He remembers glancing at Richie as his fingers tore at the paper, and his face was an image of barely contained excitement. It was a Pogo Ball.

"Don't worry, I asked your mum for permission. She said you're a big boy now and you can do what you want."

"My mum would never say anything like that."

"Well, I put her in a good mood because I fucked her nicely."

"You fucking my mum would be like rolling a golf ball up the M25."

"It was a challenging shag, yeah. All for you, Eds."

"That's disgusting. And horrifying. Please never say anything like that ever again."

"That's a promise I can't make, I'm afraid."

"I know," and under the poking from the rest of the team, he began unboxing the Pogo Ball for a go. "It's great, Rich. Thank you."

His ankle didn't break this time, but the seal around his feelings for Richie very nearly did.

~

He's close now. They sit parked up down a side street and wait, as they always do, for something to happen. It's not normally a drawn out hiatus of criminal activity - after all, it's London - but tonight there seems to be a lull on any urgency in the city, a mute on the usual soundtrack of sirens. Richie has the AUX lead, Eddie has the driver's seat - that's the rule. He's playing Gimme Shelter by The

Rolling Stones. He's softly singing along, adoration dialling down his volume. He's tapping the gentle beat on his door. Eddie keeps his eyes fixed on the raindrops that pattern the windscreen or, in fact, on anything but the passenger.

"You know what year this was released, Eds?" Richie has an admirably deep knowledge of music, and is a desirable member of pub quiz teams for the music trivia alone.

"Tell me." Eddie does not, but is willing to learn.

"1969."

"Oh, I could have guessed."

"Yeah, but The Stones have been active from the early 60's right up until today, so it's understandable that you didn't."

"I didn't even know that - are they still going now?"

"Still swinging as a bunch of leathery old ballbags, yep."

"Good on them."

"Actually, it's really interesting. This is probably one of my favourite of theirs just because of the finer details and the backstory. The chick singing, Merry Clayton, they called her up in the middle of the night and got her to go down to the recording studio and sing it. She turned up in curlers, and she was pregnant at the time, and there's this really amazing note that she hits and if you listen carefully you can hear one of the Stones 'woo' when she hits it. Anyway, it's really sad - she had a miscarriage soon after that. Some people say it was because of physical exertions during recording."

So, Eddie is absolutely open minded to learning and bearing witness to Richie's obviously outstanding musical knowledge, but he never seems to absorb it effectively. Maybe it's a lot for him to take in, maybe Eddie's memory is inferior compared to Richie's, but more likely, maybe he can't concentrate on what Richie's saying because he's fixated upon the way the man's lips shape around the words. He does his best to make it look like he's just interested in the facts, is cautious in the timing of Richie's eyes on him and that contact not



clashing with Eddie's on his mouth. All of what Richie just said, though, has mostly fallen upon deaf ears.

"That's crazy," Eddie manages to say. "I still can't get over how much you know about this kind of thing."

~

"How the hell do you retain this pointless knowledge when you can't even open a gym door?"

Tuesday night pub quiz at The Crown and Shuttle saw Eddie and Richie, Richie's friend Stan, Stan's fiancée Patty, and Eddie's friend Bill, teamed up and keen to win. It was March. Eddie's jibe prompted curiosity from the others, and Eddie gladly told the tale. What he didn't add was that in that moment he had been winded by the enlightening and devastating realisation that he was in love with the idiotic man in question.

"How can you two stand to spend time with each other outside of work? Don't you get sick of each other?" Patty had asked. Eddie had raised his glass to his lips, relying on the bubbles in his beer to fill his lungs back up with air, and looked to Richie, who of course blundered in with a response.

"Oh Eddie's definitely sick of me. I think he's just in too deep. I'm a bit like a leach; once I attach, I do not let go for dear life," he met Eddie's gaze and winked dastardly. "I'm not sick of him, though. I could never be!"

Eddie cursed the heat of his cheeks in that moment.

They won the pub quiz. Richie scooped up max points on the double up round; the topic was music. They won a meal voucher and a bucket of wine for the table.

Later, when walking to the tube, Bill couldn't help but pry.

"He's the guy that got you the Pogo Ball, right?"

"Yeah- hey, do you remember when I broke my ankle playing on yours?"

“Obviously. My mum confiscated it off of me because of that.”

“Sorry. You can borrow mine some time, if you want.”

“Could be fun,” then hung that silence that could only be filled with one destined topic. “You like him, don’t you?”

“He’s my partner, I kind of have to.”

“Eddie-”

“Bill,” he’d fixed a stern stare, withering even. His sexuality was no secret to Bill, but whenever it came down to talking about Eddie’s feelings for other men, it was never as simple as Bill liked to think he could make it. “It’s not even worth talking about.”

“We don’t have to talk about it.”

“Thank you.”

But he couldn’t resist a little bit of ‘encouragement’. “No harm biting the bullet sometimes, though.”

***A sprain for Billy is a break for you.***

~

They’ve moved on, a few streets down, and Richie’s ecstatic to have been given the opportunity to get himself an ice cream from a One Stop they’re outside of.

(“You want anything from the shop? I’m getting a Cornetto.”

“I always get brain freeze.”

“My treat?”)

Richie licks his enthusiastically, getting white splodges in the corners of his mouth, and Eddie didn’t know that such a thing was possible, but Richie’s glasses have steamed up. From the heat of his breath and the coolness of the ice cream colliding? He doesn’t know. Good excuse to keep his eyes on Richie while he timidly shaves his teeth against the strawberry jam of his own Cornetto.

"Whatcha lookin' at?" Richie eventually asks, though doesn't lift his attention from his ice cream.

"You've got-" Eddie sighs, switches his cone from his right hand to his left, and reaches across himself to steal Richie's glasses. He one handedly wipes away the steam and smeary marks from the lenses, and delivers them back to the bridge of Richie's nose, with an accidental (yet prolonged) nudge of his fingertip between Richie's brows. "Take a look at yourself, mate. You're a mess."

Richie pulls down the visor mirror and chuckles at the state of himself, just as he devours the last of the cone. "You wanna clean this up for me too?" He jests.

"Sort yourself out!" Eddie pretends like he doesn't even remotely consider it. Richie wipes at the corners of his mouth with his sleeve.

After he's finished his ice cream, they take to the road again, this time to remain moving in patrol until the early hours of the morning. Eddie once resented the night time shift, would curse the dictation his job had on his sleep pattern (or lack thereof), but with the partnership with Richie changing so many courses of view, the ones that had indented in his forehead like lines of a manifesto, that resentment softened as his fondness for the other man grew. Night-time duty is a different beast to its sunlit counterpart, something that goes without saying, for the stretch of shadows and stillness tempts the darker souls to emerge and commit crimes that the day time would expose. The roads are always quieter, which counts as a blessing, for blue-lighting through London in the daytime is something of a task when the roads are nose to tail queues. At night time, they can get to where they need to be with relative ease, they can drive as fast as required (which to Eddie is a luxury).

For now, they stick to the speed limit, for there's nothing to hurry for.

"Hey Eddie," Richie breaks their lapse into comfortable silence - save for his selected soundtrack of The Specials - after ten minutes of cruising through Wandsworth. "Who am I-" it's a choked, nasal cockney accent. *"D'you know, I'd almost forgotten what your eyes looked like. They're still the same. Pissholes in the snow."*

"You just sound like you with a cold." Eddie likes to humour Richie's

love of impersonations, but also likes to point out that, mostly, they all sound the same.

"Go on, guess. See if you can get it in three quotes," Richie's pressing enthusiastically and Eddie thinks it's so adorable that he's tempted to take his eyes off the road. *"She was only fifteen years old!"*

"I really don't know, Rich."

"Do you want your third and final clue?"

"Can I phone a friend?"

"No. No! You have to get it all by yourself."

"I'm at a disadvantage though because your voices are fucking terrible and I have no idea what you're quoting!"

"You will get it on the last quote. I believe in you, and also my ability to whack out incredibly accurate impressions."

"That I have yet to witness."

"Your mum's witnessed me whack out something else..."

"Oi, shut your fucking mouth!" Eddie masks his chuckle (his affection) with an irritated snap and in his peripheral vision he can see Richie's shoulders shaking. "Go on then, do the last one."

*"You were only supposed to blow the bloody doors off!"*

"Oh, for fucks sake. Michael Caine. How was I supposed to get that before you did the last one!? Who even knows what the other quotes are?"

"You're telling me you've never seen Get Carter?"

"No I have never seen Get Carter. I've never seen whatever the bloody doors off quote is from either."

"The Italian Job."

"Right. I've never seen that. I only knew who it was because every

ammeter impressionist does it. Sounded nothing like him.”

*“Ruprecht! Do you want the genital cuff?”*

“What’s that?”

“Dirty Rotten Scoundrels. That’s one of my all time favourite films.”  
Richie switches to a voice that’s supposed to be Steve Martin.  
*“Oklahoma! Oklahoma! Oklahoma!”*

“I’ll never understand how you have had time to absorb all this knowledge about music, and about films and quotes while working full time as a PC.”

“Well, I mean, it’s age old knowledge, too. I was allowed to indulge in the arts when I was a kid. Unlike some people,” Richie’s talking with the speed and tone that Eddie knows to be amiss of brakes, and has seen bulldoze carelessly into sensitive topics one too many times. Subconsciously, he grips the steering wheel tighter, and Richie runs his mouth. “What did Miss Trunchbull let you do for fun as a kid, Eds? Apart from force feeding you placebos and locking you in The Chokey, I mean.”

Eddie says nothing. It's a funny thing, the presence of his mother existing within a new relationship. He hadn't invited it, nor had he subjectively disallowed it, for with every 'your mum' joke Richie fired, Eddie only voiced a simple 'fuck you' in return. Richie knew a little about Eddie's past, knew bits and bobs about the obsession with Eddie's health, but no true details. It all started when, on duty, they had swung by Mrs Kaspbraks flat to run an errand; Richie has stayed in the car, and caught a glimpse of the elderly woman in her pig pink nightie (which was less than complimentary to the fuchsia hue of her swollen cheeks), and had said when Eddie returned to the car, "you didn't tell me your mum was a milf," and Eddie had replied with, "don't start," and Richie had overlapped that with, "I'd like to put an unexpected item in her bagging area," and the rest was, as they say, history.

The crude jokes are something Eddie can deal with. The jokes about his childhood, as Richie is learning now, are a completely different kettle of fish.

“Shit.” Richie whispers.

Eddie clears his throat, and he feels Richie’s panic prick his skin like pins and needles. It’s possibly the first time Eddie has reacted to Richie’s teasing with silence. Come to think of it, it’s possibly the first time Richie has reacted to his own words with panic, too.

“I went too far.”

Eddie clears his throat again, and then, “I haven’t spoken to my mother in two years, you know.”

This time, Richie is the one who’s silent, and Eddie cannot stop himself from spilling.

“She was a nasty piece of work, don’t get me wrong, I’m not naive to that. I look back on my childhood now with anger and hatred, but when I was a kid, she pretty much brainwashed me into loving her. I mean, I did love her. I loved her a lot. But I didn’t have a Dad and she kind of made it impossible for me to not love her, because I depended on her so much. You’re right, she did dose me up with placebos. It was fucked up. She-” He chokes, and his voice splinters with trepidation, or something of the like. His eyes stay on the road, and he’s glad of that, even though he can feel Richie’s gaze on him and he imagines the pity shadowing his expression. Eddie shakes his head, shakes off the emotional spiel that had encapsulated him. “Sorry. I don’t want to offload on you.”

But Richie reassures him, “You can talk. I’m listening.” and it’s all Eddie needs to go on.

“I just - it’s kind of hard to talk about, Rich. It was seriously unhealthy but that was like, the main objective. To not be unhealthy, I mean. She was fucking obsessive about my health, like beyond paranoid, and I know now that I didn’t have what other kids had in a childhood. I mean, I kind of knew it back then but I was so ground down by her neurosis and her fucking strangulating love that I just kind of let it happen and wished that I could do shit that other kids did that I wasn’t allowed to do. Because I was too weak, or some shit. She used to phone the school and rage at them about letting me participate in PE. And I really loved playing games, I especially loved

running because I was actually surprisingly fast but, yeah, no physical activities allowed. I was allergic to everything and getting over a sickness but I have no idea what it was. Turns out it wasn't me, I was fine, she was sick in the head. She never went to the doctors about herself though. Sometimes I wish she'd gone, and then maybe I would have had a better childhood, because I wouldn't be under her care anymore. Isn't that fucked up?" Eddie paused to breathe and shakes his head, beside him Richie is still, and they simmer in silence for a second or two.

"So, in short," Richie cracks, "she kept you in The Chokey and force fed you placebos."

Eddie can't battle the laughter that splits his face into a wide grin. "Pretty much, yeah."

"Seriously though, that's awful, Eds. I'm sorry. And I shouldn't have joked about it in the first place."

"I know you can't help yourself, you gobby son of a bitch."

"Don't you bring my mother into this!"

They laugh together; it's a moment of strangely brought about purity. Eddie feels himself melt into the synthetic feel of the driver's seat and relish in this odd dynamic of back and forth teasing and dependability they have established without attempt. This is when he's close to saying it. An 'I love you' would work perfectly to pluck away the remaining stitches holding together his patchwork heart, though whether or not that would be a good thing or not remains to be seen, and thus he keeps seam ripper to himself. Enough of its contents have been spilled into Richie's lap for one night, Eddie tells himself, save it for now.

"Is it a bad thing?" Richie asks, and because it's detached from the previous topic of unstitched wounds, Eddie shoots him a brief look of confusion. "I mean, that you haven't spoken to your mum in so long."

"Oh," Eddie tries to find an answer, but he can't see for the swirling storm of thoughts of Richie. Of the way they are with each other. Of the way Eddie so quietly, so desperately loves him. He can only shine

a matchstick light on an answer. "It's neither good nor bad, we fell out over something ridiculous-"

What he's about to say is a vital detail in the story, and detrimental to the future too, but typically, it's cut off by more pressing circumstances. By duty. A junction ahead spits out a speeding BMW that proceeds to hurtle down the road before them.

"Here we go then." Richie sighs, and Eddie presses the siren activation switch as his foot slams to the ground and their world turns blue and red.

Richie speaks into the carphone, reporting a speeding vehicle, and informs the station of the situation and reads the car's number plate. "It's been reported before," he tells Eddie, who's foot cannot press harder on the accelerator pedal, despite the urgent need for maximum speed. "Two offences of careless driving, three parking tickets and a speeding fine."

Eddie gulps. That means they'll be taking this guy's license, and with the past offences and current circumstance (in which he is not pulling over) in mind, Eddie knows that this situation is bound to be a hairy one.

Right now, they've caught up to the BMW and hang close as the driver persists stubbornly to ignore them. He's not trying to lose them, not driving particularly aggressively, he's just driving fast and refusing to pull over.

"He'll be on something," Richie comments, and Eddie nods with a stiff nervousness. "Hope he's not aggressive."

The indicators, at last, begin to flash, and slowly both cars veer to the left and park up. Richie is out of the car without hesitation, and Eddie has to wait where he is, swamped in the blinking siren lights. They illuminate the scene that Eddie keeps his eyes intent upon; Richie boldly struts to the car, the driver staggers out and throws his arms in the air in defence. Richie stumbles back a little to keep a safe distance and the muffled voices sound vexed and disturbed. Eddie squints, leans forward for better sight, and sees that Richie is holding himself far too defensively for what the situation should be. So Eddie



slides from his seat and cautiously heads towards the scene. He keeps a safe distance, however, so as not to crowd the erratic man.

"I'm not on nothin'" the driver slurs, and flaps his arms up again, repeating the previous motion like it's some sort of distress signal. "An' I was stickin' to the limit. I was doin' 29 in a 30 an' there's nothin' wrong with that."

"You were doing 55." Richie counteracts calmly, and Eddie's chest swells with admiration for the composure his colleague displays. In his mind, in that moment, the word colleague fits, but it's a bad fit that squirms and begs for a different outfit.

The driver begins to pace, his head shaking perhaps with disbelief, but more likely because he's off his nut on narcotics. Coolly, Richie steps in front of the man and interrupts his rampant, raging trail, and places a firm hand on his upper arm. Eddie can practically taste the steaming energy from the driver; it's bitter and flammable. He could light a match and the tangibly angry air would burst into flames. There are so many variables to this type of event, and each rest on extremely thin ice, which Richie and Eddie are supposed to symbiotically weigh up. What of their own actions might cause the ice to break? If it's not of their own doing, what might it be that they need to prevent?

It's hard to say here, but it looks like Richie has control - the driver seems to somewhat simmer.

"Come on now, mate. If you're not on anything and you aren't over the legal limit then you don't have anything to worry about, do you? We're just going to breathalyze you, and then providing you're safe to do so, you can be on your way. Alright?" As Richie speaks he shoots Eddie a brief nod, and Eddie knows what to do. He needs to fetch the breath testing kit from the car.

It's at this point that Eddie makes two crucial mistakes.

The first, is that he turns his back to the scene, and misses the snap of chaos that ensues. He hears Richie's voice raise, hears a scuffle of soles against the pavement, and the other man make some kind of grunt. Eddie tries to piece together the series of sounds before he

thinks to turn to them (he realises later that he delayed in turning to the scene out of fear), and another sensation is added to the mix in the way of his heart beating up into his throat and his blood rushing through to his sinuses in a hot flood of panic. He seems to turn to Richie in slow motion, feels the universe speed down to an incomprehensible pace as he pivots, whereas in reality, he's swivelling to face his partner quicker than humanly possible.

Richie is on his knees, doubled, clutching bloody palms in his lap.

The second mistake that Eddie makes is that instead of attempting to apprehend the perpetrator, he chooses to go to Richie. The other present man jumps back into his car and speeds away with a screech of rubber.

"Rich!" Eddie's voice is wrought with hysteria that he simply cannot shrink down to a professional manner. He's on his knees now, too, and he's fumbling at the bloody hands that Richie cradles. "What happened? What the fuck just happened!?"

"The cunt had a knife." Richie says flatly, and Eddie cannot fathom how even his voice is. *He's in shock*, he thinks, *he must be in shock*.

"Shit-" Eddie's fingers scrabble at the reddened garments clinging to Richie's body. He's looking for the wound but he can't find it, can't locate where the knife found entrance. He'd have more rational sight if he weren't shaken with fear. "Fuck, Richie, you need to help me. Where's the cut? We need to get you back to the car."

"Eddie," Richie croaks. His eyes are closed. He's white as a sheet. "Eds, listen, you have to know- I have to tell you something." He grabs Eddie's hand and holds his fingers entwined with his own, both sets of digits scarlet and wet. Eddie's pulse is archaic, and Richie would feel it, if only his touch would inch a little toward Eddie's wrist.

"Yes, what- what is it?" Eddie's mouth is dry and for a moment, the fear that had heightened every single one of his senses is swapped out with some different kind of shock. Now is hardly the time for a

confession, but God, does he want it. If that's what this is. What would he do, if that's what this moment is? What if he lost Richie now, if this wound is fatal? What if this moment is what he thinks it is, and Richie's okay? What then? He's gripping Richie's fingers harder than he means to, and he's breathing so shallow that his lungs are failing to inflate. Perhaps those bags in his chest are as useless as his mother had always said.

Richie pauses and licks his lips. His eyes, Eddie notices, haven't once left Eddie - they stay in place, certain and unafraid, blisteringly blue, and melting into the brown of Eddie's own. Richie matches the grip, ensnaring Eddie's fingers and pressing hard into his knuckles. It's a desperate, passionate touch, but it's a lifeline too. Eddie considers that this link of hands is a unison of fear, with both men gripping onto each other and terrified that letting the other go meant letting go of so much more. They remain on hold, moulded into a desperate shape, linked together, and Eddie recounts all the many times he came so close to spilling his painfully kept secret, and how all of them pale in comparison to the distance of this occasion. He could say it now, it wouldn't be out of place, it would just be another impassioned tether to the moment, frozen in time.

But then, Richie does as Richie always does, and spoils it all.

"He just stabbed my leg, I'm not dying or anything." He says, and he smiles. It's both wonderful and infuriating. But that sentence doesn't really spoil it.

"You-" Eddie breathes out, rocks back on his knees, and loosens the grip of Richie's hand. It's like Richie's thrown ice onto volcanic rock. The way Eddie's panic soothes is almost relaxing, and he whistles through his teeth as he takes in the sight of his partner's face that cracks into the goofiest smile going. Once his anxiety has almost entirely lifted, Eddie realises that Richie still has hold of his hand. He looks down at their linked fingers and let's his forehead decrease, his scowl lift. But then anger boils up quicker than Eddie can put a lid on it. "You fucking wanker! What kind of an evil fucker are you!? I thought - you absolute - I fucking hate you."

Richie's laughing. Eddie both hates and loves that. "Aww, Eddie Spaghetti! You were so scared!"

"Yeah. Thanks a lot, you asshole." Eddie takes a deep breath and pinches the bridge of his nose with screwed shut eyes, attempting his very best calming technique. It subsides almost effortlessly as soon as his eyes open once more and gaze upon the dorky smile that Richie beams up at him.

"Did you think I was about to die?"

"I mean, you put on a pretty convincing act."

"I fucking had you so good! Oh my God, imagine that. PC Tozier dies whilst on nighttime traffic duty in an attempt to apprehend a drunk driver with a knife."

"A tragic death, in more ways than one."

"In more ways than you'd think," Richie seems contemplative as he says this, and his eyes fall to their hands. Eddie follows their journey and lands on the same spot. "I'd have a serious amount of unfinished business."

Those pathetic lungs of his give out again, and Eddie has to focus his vision to see through the still whirling blue and red. Richie sweeps his thumb over Eddie's skin, leaving a smudge of red there. Eddie watches, his heartbeat impossibly fast, his ribcage impossibly brittle. Both men kneel in this colourful flashing segment of reality, physically linked, mentally tangled, and wondering what happens now that this boundary line has been breached. Whatever it is that happens, at least the origin story will always be timeless. Feelings between two policemen uncovered by an incident involving a drunk in a BMW and a non-fatal stab wound, on the side of the road on Garratt Lane.

"We should get you to the hospital, Rich." Eddie says, hurtling them both back to that spot in reality.

"Ever the voice of wisdom," Richie agrees, but still, his hold on Eddie's hand remains. "What would I do without you?"

Neither of them know the answer to that, but both hope to never have the answer, either.

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The wait in A&E is a drag, as always, but they sit together in comfortable silence and it passes by quick enough. Eddie tries his best to relish in the excuse for his shift to end earlier, but what claws at his mind is the sentiment sprawled across both of their laps, and the conversation it would invite once Richie has been seen by a doctor. The wait for that conversation alone is torture, nevermind the wait for the doctor. In the quiet, Eddie recounts the entire scenario, trying as hard as he can to sharpen the details and remove the hopefulness and feelings for his partner that might have potentially skewed the reality of it. But the sharper the picture, the more he comes to the conclusion that it was exactly as it seemed, and his year long wishful thinking was null and void in this example. The moment was real.

Richie's stab wound needs to be glued back together, and then he's good to go.

"Does it hurt? Eddie asks now, as they sit in their car, parked in a near empty moonlit hospital car park.

"It's not that bad, to be honest. It was the shock that got me more than anything." Richie fiddles with the torn material around his bandaged thigh, and his eyes are fixed to the movements his fingers make. Eddie gets only mimicked flashes of the cerulean blue of Richie's eyes, made by the moonlight reflecting against his glasses.

"Bloody hell, that shock," with the back of his hand rubbing a newly formed lump in his throat, Eddie remembers that petrifying feeling that had captured him upon seeing Richie collapsed on the ground and covered in blood. "I felt it too."

"Yeah, I know. I'm sorry about that-" Richie rasps, and slides his vision up now; his face gradually transforms to a saddened smile as his vision settles on Eddie, who returns the look. "I'm sorry for being a dickhead and pranking you, too."

"That was so not funny and I'm never going to forgive you. I was so fucking scared." Eddie says, but juxtaposed to his words, he chuckles. "Nah, really, it's fine. That whole 'I need to tell you something'

always gets you going though, no matter the circumstance.”

Silence. Eddie wishes there were crickets to fill the thick quiet, underneath which only skims a distant city soundscape of traffic.

At last, Richie clears his throat. “Well, I did have something, actually. I just bottled it.”

Eddie gulps. “I’m willing to give you another go at telling me, whatever it was?”

Richie husks a hollow laugh. “What if I’m still feeling too chicken?”

“I can, I don’t know- egg you on?”

“Egg me on?”

“Yeah, you know. Like, ‘come on, Rich! I believe in you!’”

“Thanks, but I’m way past moral support on this.”

“Well, I’m not going to guess, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

“Go on, guess.”

“No. Fuck off.”

“Guess.”

Eddie turns his head away, shaking it and biting his lip. “You’re unbelievable.” He mutters, before turning back once more. “What if I told you I had something to tell you, too.”

“Ah, incentive. I like your style.” Richie breaks into a grin that, once more, knocks Eddie totally breathless. “You have to go first, though.”

“Rich, that’s not how incentives work. You have to go first.”

“No, you.”

“You.”

“You!”

And then it's there, out and grasped by two pairs of lips, clashing together as Eddie finally says 'fuck it', pushes forward and kisses Richie with every unspoken sentiment harboured by the both of them. The kiss is firm, clumsy, and tasting of impatience, but more than anything, it's reciprocated. Richie kisses Eddie back, his hand moving up to clutch the back of Eddie's neck, keeping him there, right where he's wanted him for so long. Richie tells him this, translates the length of time spent yearning for his partner, into kisses that leave Eddie's mouth and trail along his cheek and along his jawline, until he reaches his ear and places one last, light kiss against it's lobe. He holds Eddie tight to him, and Eddie's arms envelope Richie's waist as Richie speaks low, "I've been in love with you for so long, Eddie."

The words make Eddie's stomach flip. It doesn't feel real. He pivots the angle of his face into the crook of Richie's neck, where he softly kisses the stubbled skin. He retraces the path Richie had taken away from his own lips, copying the pattern and reprinting it on Richie's skin, from neck, to jaw, to cheek, to mouth.

"I had no idea," Eddie whispers, now that he rests his forehead against Richie's. "How long?"

"I realised I was in love with you that night we went to the pub quiz. Stan pointed out that I was flirting with you. Remember I said about how I could never be sick of you? I missed it, you missed it, but Stan doesn't miss a trick. After you and Bill left he said, point blank, 'so when are you going to stop fucking around and tell him that you love him?' and I snubbed it. I was like, 'nah, Eddie? I don't love him'. But I knew I was kidding myself. I didn't sleep at all that night."

"Wow. I'll have to write Stan a thank you card."

"He'd hate that, I'm sure."

They laugh, the hot air from their mouths meeting between them, and they kiss again.

"I win, though."

"What do you mean?"

"I've loved you longer than that. I realised I was in love with you when we went to that job at the Peckham gym."

"Oh shit, door gate?"

"Yep. I watched you battling with that buzzer and I thought to myself, 'what a moron. I love him so much.' And when you'd got inside, I drove around the block to shake off this crazy feeling I'd just unearthed. That I was in love with you. But, well obviously, I never did shake it off." Eddie's fingers trail up Richie's back and twist into his hair. "I'm still in love with you."

"Fuck, I'm so glad I got stabbed." Richie laughs, and Eddie moves back a little, yearning to look at Richie with new eyes. Now, he looks at his partner that loves him, the same way that he has for so long.

"Shall we write a thank you card for that maniac that did it, too?"

"Great idea. 'Dear BMW Cunt, thank you for stabbing me, because now I can stab the guy I love with my-'"

"No. Shut up. I'll kill you myself."

Richie drifts forward with a smile that makes his eyes shine the brightest blue Eddie has ever seen, and they kiss again. It's a deeper kiss, more confident, more lustful, and Eddie secretly wishes for it to never end. When it does, laying eyes upon Richie in all his loved up wonder is a very fair compromise.

"Is this the reason why you fell out with your mum? Because you're gay?" Richie asks, and though it's a very raw topic, he delivers his question with such softness that Eddie cannot be hurt by it at all. Either it's the delivery, or the fact that Eddie is simply floating up in the clouds, thanks to all of this newly shared love.

"Yeah, it is. I always wished I had gotten it out the way sooner. But it was so fucking frightening. I know it is for everyone, but my mum's fear of 'sickness' was mostly deep rooted homophobia, so I was really reluctant to accept it myself for a very long time. It's kind of hard to explain, but me being gay was basically the worst thing that could have happened to me. So once I told her, I knew there would be no



going back - up until I did, I was terrified of that.”

“What changed?”

“I don’t know,” Eddie casts his mind back to that time in his life, but the only thing that comes to mind is Richie, who had been his partner for a year at that time. “Maybe I fell in love with you sooner than I realised, and it was that that gave me the push.”

Richie smiles and links their fingers together. “You’re brave,” he says, with a squeeze of his hand. “Much braver than you give yourself credit for.”

“Thanks Rich,” Eddie’s eyes are soft and swim with starlight. “I love you... Now that we’ve started saying it, we’re not going to be able to stop.”

“I don’t think that’s a bad thing at all. We’ve both waited long enough.” He leans in and kisses Eddie once more. “I love you too. Now take me home, I want to make up for lost time with you.”

They never do stop saying it, and each time they do, it’s like new.